

2014

Time Frame

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TIME FRAME

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agriculture & Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in
The Department of Art

by
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B.F.A., University of Dhaka, 2009
August 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Kelli Scott Kelley for being my thesis chair and an invaluable mentor during my time in Graduate School. I also wish to thank to my thesis committee members Denyce Celentano and Ed Smith both of you have in your own way been an indispensable influence on my work. I would like to thank Frederick Ortner from bottom of my heart for giving me huge support during my academic years in LSU. Special thanks to John Malveto, Darius Spieth, James Beaman, Vincent A. Cellucci, Malcom McClay, Rod Parker, Lynne Joddrell Baggett, Courtney Barr, Leslie Koptcho, and Derick Ostrenko. Much thanks is in order for all my fellow graduate artists. Each of you has enriched my experience here and without your help it would have been more difficult for to fit into the system as a foreign student. To my wife Tajreen Shupti, your kind support gave me strong mental strength which is invaluable for me. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents and the rest of my family members for their unwavering support in my pursuits as a student, painter and teacher.

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ABSTRACT

I am interested in painting figures from direct observation as well as from photographs and memory in an invented theatrical interior space. My models act in an artificial stage to create the drama of a narrative. My figurative paintings present a rolling panoramic space that is manipulated over time. In addition, as a foreign student I had access to many sights in the new world once I came to the United States for the very first time. The expansiveness of the capital culture helped to develop the depth of my narratives in my art work.

INTRODUCTION

My father introduced me to art for the very first time. Even I forget when I started to draw. He used to bring me to the children art competitions and was extremely passionate and hopeful about his son's art career. As a return I rarely disappointed him. Therefore, within seven years as a child artist, I achieved almost 500 national and international awards. As a small kid, I never realized the happiness of my success by myself. However, I could feel the joy behind my father's sparkling eyes for the success of his son. I received the first break when I was selected as a junior ambassador from Bangladesh to join the 7th Asian Pacific Children Convention, Fukuoka, Japan in 1995. More than 480 children from different parts of the world joined the same convention.

The story started when I came back home after 15 days from Japan. All of a sudden I discovered myself as a local hero. People started to visit my house to see an 11 year old child, who was sent abroad by the government for his art. Local news published articles about me. Moreover, I was the pioneer member of my family who flew for the very first time. Consequently, my confidence was getting higher by the day. After that I never looked back. The next part of my life was highly successful. I started to win prizes one after another from the competitions, but I wasn't introduced with the dark part yet. Frustration, anxiety and many other painful things were waiting for me for my near future. My father helped me to see the dream indeed. He did everything for me beyond his ability. Belonging to a lower middle class family in a third world nation, it was next to impossible to bear the costs of the art materials. My father never let me realize that fact. Furthermore, he had to fight against the social and religious barriers for his son where drawing figures are prohibited. He did everything that he could including showing me successful artists as my benchmark. It is not unfair expecting the elder son to share responsibilities from his father in my cultural background. As a result, his expectation of me also started to higher and higher.

Perhaps he isolated one rough truth about his son's future: that is the craggy reality of an artist's life.

I was living in my father's dreams as an obedient child. The dream he couldn't fulfill because of poverty. At the starting point, apparently it wasn't me who chose art as a profession. Furthermore, I wasn't of an age yet to make a decision for myself. Overall, I felt a dilemma in my art practice. Whatever I was making I couldn't feel a deep attachment with it until I started to copy nature with watercolor. Studying watercolor became a part of my life. The transparent process of watercolor was very attractive, innovative and exciting to me. I was sunken into watercolor nature study paintings. All of a sudden the junkyards, old cities, rickshaws, river ports, local markets started to carry my identity as an artist.

For the last 12 years I have never seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Though I started to walk in it by holding my father's fingers, I decided to keep walking in the same way by myself at the age of 18. I felt a strong compulsion to complete this path. Now I know there is no end of this tunnel. All you can see is nothing but a mirage or reflection. However, the journey is exciting, adventurous, filled with the joy of creation, and very unique. For me, it's about different time frames that are captured on canvas.

ACADEMIC ART PRACTICE IN BANGLADESH

I received my undergraduate degree from Dhaka University, Bangladesh. The academic curriculum of my university was based on a so-called classical art format. It has a deep connection with the British art school. For 200 years, the sub-continent was colonized by the British raj. Our school of art's founding father, Zainul Abedin, had been trained at Kolkata Art College in India, which was established by the British raj. He brought the same kind of schooling system to East Pakistan after the separation between India and Pakistan. Unfortunately the academic system was never modernized until now. Though many faculty got the opportunity to study abroad after the liberation war against Pakistan in 1971, they never introduced their modern experience to the academic curriculum of the school. Though we were able to bring freedom to our country, due to enormous corruption our entire education system is still in the same old phase. As a result, we are still following the same syllabus that was used in 1947. Nevertheless, there is a certain type of advantage for having this kind of problem. Students are quite skillful in drawing and painting. However, the school is producing more of a craftsman than an intellectual. When I studied in the United States, I gradually came to know about the universe of modern art. My undergraduate background gave me an advantage in drawing and painting, but my new interpretation of this modern world has enhanced the concepts of art practice.

MY ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE IN BATON ROUGE

As an alien, the first year in Baton Rouge was a nightmare for me. I was not familiar with this kind of modern electronic education system, where I had to select courses and all other education related formalities online. Moreover, the cultural values that I brought with me sometimes created problems for me. For an example, greeting professors by their names was really difficult for me. However, it took me little while to adapt to the western culture. As a result, admittedly the first year in the program was not my strong year. It was quite unsure and stilted for me.

I experimented with political content in some of my paintings. Since politics has always been an important subject matter in art history, I found political phenomena was interesting and very powerful at the same time. However, being a citizen in a third world nation where you are directly a victim of corruption, it's not irrelevant to have political content in your paintings. As seen in *Target I* (Figure 1), I explored the possibility of working on a painting continuously over the summer in my first year. This work enhanced my credibility for the very first time as a contemporary painter.



Figure 1: A K M Javed Rashel, *Target I*, 2012

I signed up for a landscape course the next semester and was introduced to a certain type of limited color palette. These experiences were entirely new for me. In the painting *A Sunny day* (Figure 2) I experimented with various temperatures of grays in my surface.

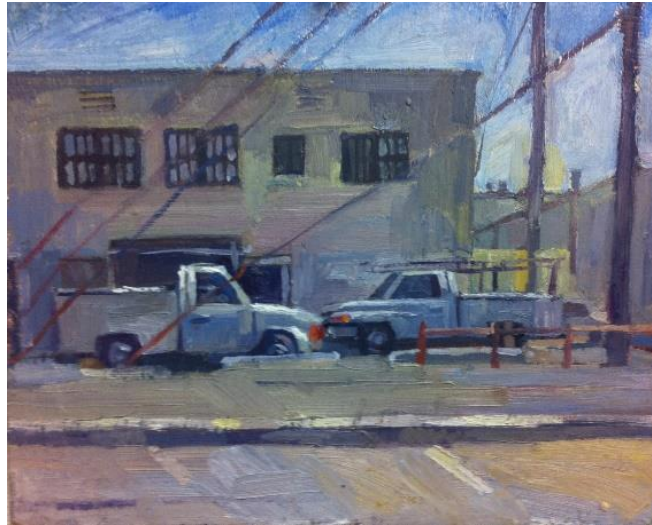


Figure 2: A K M Javed Rashel, *A Sunny Day*, 2012

SUBJECT

As an international artist, I have a chance to see east and west simultaneously. There is no comparison between The United States and Bangladesh. The first thing strikes in my mind when I came over here that is its gigantism. Shopping malls, super markets, parking lots are ubiquitous. As an alien, it was really a new experience for me. Born and raised in a capital city, I had some idea about globalized multinational capitalism, but I came to know about the real bourgeois capitalism when I came to this country. As an artist I picked that phenomenon in my art work. On the one hand, products are unnecessarily available (in the U.S.), on the other hand people are dying because of hunger in other parts of the world. I could not accept his discrimination and inequity. During my undergrad program I painted a couple of local market paintings. In the painting *Local Market I* (Figure 3), the concept of market is completely opposite from here. The economic structure is small business oriented. Over here the gigantic economic system undoubtedly causes some clear economical distinctions in the society. As a result, rich people are becoming richer, poor people are getting poorer. In addition, the small investors cannot compete against the gigantic corporations. Consequently, two classes of people are going to stay in the society. First, the owner class who can control and manipulate the market and the second one is the working class who are providing alienated labor for their owners. In my paintings, I symbolized the never ending shopping mall as a symbol of gigantic capital culture and people suffering with obesity as a by production of extreme capitalism. This is seen in *Supermarket I* (Figure 4) and *Supermarket II* (Figure 5).



Figure 3: A K M Javed Rashel, *Local Market I*, 2006



Figure 4: A K M Javed Rashel, *Supermarket I*, 2013



Figure 5: A K M Javed Rashel, *Supermarket II*, 2013

Our civilization is crossing a complicated situation in this twenty first century. It seems people are dividing in to groups. Extremism is always harmful for our morality whether it is religious belief, political power or economic classification. Consequently, it is political aggression that creates the chaotic atmosphere in our society. People come to the street for their rights. In a counter action, rulers apply repression to stop the protest. Throughout this decade we see many major political events in the world. For example, Arab spring, Ukraine crisis, political chaos in Bangladesh etc. However, every movement has a basic motto that is humanity. Through brushes and colors I can raise my voice and participate with these protests from my side. I am also interested to paint the psychology between the relationship of men and women. I think that human civilization is moving forward based on the relationships of men and women. A man and a woman is the smallest particle of our society. I always found an existing co-relationship between outside chaotic conflicts with a relationship between man and a woman in an interior space. The male figures are portrayed as a dominating power while tormented female figures represent the underdog eastern world in my paintings. The upturned chair, opened suitcase, scattered objects on the floor are telling a story. The story has the same tension as the street protest. The man is symbolized as a ruler and the woman herself as ordinary people. It is difficult to explain my genre paintings in words, but every single piece represents a different time frame that influenced me in a certain period of my life. The next one may be different from the last one. They always overlap each other. These were the diverse subject matters that inspired me throughout the MFA program. I experimented with this content to build my genre paintings. The vision of the painted world was limitless for me. Nevertheless, every single moment was an individual time frame that is deeply attached with my narrative paintings.

OBJECTS AND PRASPECTIVE

I am interested in hiding the content inside of the objects in my paintings. That is how I rendered my narrative paintings. I work primarily on large figure paintings that are partially story based and metaphoric in content and still life paintings that are done from observation from a theatrical stage setup. I see the figure paintings and the still lifes as interrelated. The same objects will make appearances in different paintings and contribute to the conversation between the paintings. I am interested in arrangement, context and paint itself as a conveyor of sensate experience. Through my still life arrangement I can create a perspective that can help to drag our eyes inside of the pictorial space where mainly we see silent dialogs between couples or single figures. I like to show the doors ajar in my pictorial space. The ajar door helps to create a mystery in the story that's going on in the interior space between a male and a female (Figure 6). The upturned chair, open suitcase and other furniture collaborate with the notion of the male and female relationship where man is portrayed as a dominating character. According to the rules of drawing, the perspective in my paintings may not be accurate, but I intentionally manipulated the perspective of the rolling and wavy floor to enhance the psychological drama of the male and female relationship in the interior space.



Figure 6: A K M Javed Rashel, *An Unfolding Story II*, 2014

The large figure paintings are conceived from imagination but are based on real life experience and location. The still life paintings are worked strictly from observation. They often contain references to the figure paintings in that there is a certain environment of objects I tend to work with. Again, I think there is role playing that goes on in the still lifes and a kind of sexual narrative that gets acted out. I look for a relationship between artifacts of culture (both high and low) and nature. The still lifes are predicated on the fact that still life can contain more "non sense" that things can coexist without the kind of contextual reality that the figure demands.

SOURCES OF IMAGERY

Mainly I enjoy working from direct observation. In addition, I would like to take help from photographs and memory to render my narrative paintings in order to fulfill the subject demands. Painting from life allows me to imitate nature. I find that copying nature helps me to develop my own personality. Painting from life is not only the imitational study of nature, but also it is an evocative meeting of a unique view point and an individual personality in front of the canvas. I strongly believe the result will be different if ten people copy the same subject at the same time. In *Art and Illusion* E.H. Gombrich wrote, “In order to learn, we must make mistakes, and most faithful mistake which nature could have implanted in us would be the assumption of even greater simplicities than we are likely to meet with in this bewildering world of us.” Working from nature is a process of discovery for me. It is a slow inquiry where from I can reveal something new. “Painting is a science,” Constable said, “and should be pursued as an inquiry in to the laws of nature.”

I create the theatrical set up based on the content of my painting. I invite my models in my created stage and explain them the narratives of the paintings. I allow them to act. Since it is an expansive process, I sometimes fail to complete my paintings during the act. Moreover, I often like to manipulate the interior space based on my imagination and the subject demands of the painting. Under these circumstances, I rely on my memory. Memory and imagination have played an essential role in the temporal construction of my interior spaces. In the *Poetics of Space* Gaston Bachelard wrote “...memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening. In the order of values they both constitute a community of memory and image. Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the

telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days.”

As an artist I use live study, photographs, and memory as transmitters of the information that I am painting on my canvas. I strongly believe every individual process has a unique aspect. My intention is get the best information whether it is from life or from a photograph. It is a composite of observation, photographs and memory simultaneously.

ARTIST INFLUENCES

Early influences such as Edward Hopper, George Bellows, Euan Uglow are significant formally and conceptually. Hopper's psychological paintings inspired me to render my relationship paintings in the interior space (Figure 7). In addition, I juxtaposed figures and still life objects to convey an uncanny situation on the surface to help create a quiet atmosphere in my paintings (Figure 8). For various reasons sexual discrimination take place in my paintings. Perhaps it is my root where women are still treated as prisoners.



Figure 7: Edward Hopper, *Room in New York*, 1932



Figure 8: A K M Javed Rashel, *An Unfolding Story III*, 2014

I like George Bellows paintings for a specific reason. He is a master who presented a definite society structure of his time period in his paintings. The present scenario of Bangladesh

and India is identical to Bellows's election campaign paintings. Lucian Freud has been an influence in my paintings for a long time. The painting '*A Waiting Room*' (Figure 9) painted from Freudian influences. I had an opportunity to see Freud's body of work in the Modern Art Museum, Dallas in 2012. The museum exhibited approximately 90 works, dating between 1943-2011. It was a great experience for me to see the real pieces for the very first time. Usually, I saw these works in books or on computer monitors. I was amazed to see the passionate, dedication to observation Freud shows in these paintings. You can read every single patch's complexion in his work. It is a deeply abstract investigative process in his realistic figurative paintings (Figure 10).



Figure 9: A K M Javed Rashel, *A waiting Room*, 2014



Figure 10: Lucian Freud, *Two Irishmen in W11*, 1984-5

Working with a thinner application of paint never appealed to me until I saw Euan Uglow's work in person. His thinly applied brush strokes seemed every bit as rich and viable to me as Freud's impasto patches. Furthermore, I also follow many contemporary painters such as Antonio Lopez Garcia, Sangram Majumdar, Diarmuid Kelley, Gideon Bok, Eve Mansdorf, Tai Shan.

TIME FRAME

Over the last year my work has changed expressively from monotonous narrative function to a greater interest in formal investigations. In earlier paintings such as *Two Different Worlds* (Figure 11) where interior space seems arbitrary and color application looks very loose. The sultry figures are seated on the chairs, but not yet exactly participating in the entire environment of the painting. I have regenerated the same topic in the painting *An Unfolding Story I* (Figure 12). In this painting I created a theatrical stage to make my narratives clearer and stronger than before. I also worked with more emphatic color to correct the muddiness that was a problem in my earlier paintings.

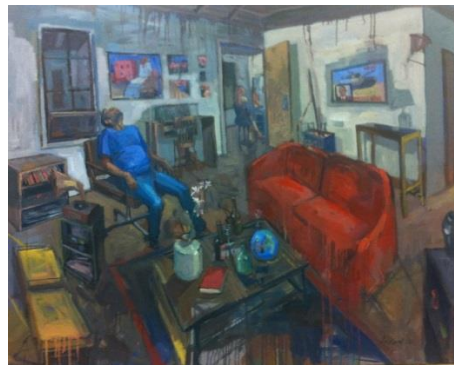


Figure 11: AKM Javed Rashel, *Two Different Worlds*, 2013



Figure 12: AKM Javed Rashel, *An Unfolding story I*, 2013

Though I have dealt with different subject matter throughout my time in this program. The paintings of the relationships between men and women will remain at the forefront of my investigations. This is a fascinating subject matter where an artist can excavate inside for his whole life. Nevertheless, who knows the future? This is an individual time frame that I am dealing with now that is part of my journey in the tunnel. The next one still remains to unfold.

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VITA

A K M Javed Rashel was born in Bangladesh in a Christmas in 1984. Shohrab Uddin and Jahanara Shohrab are his father and mother. He started his art career as a child artist at the age of eight. He joined Asian Pacific children convention, Fukuoka, Japan from Bangladesh as a junior ambassador in 1995. He joined the same convention as a peace ambassador in 2005. He leded Bridge Club International Organization as a president in the year of 2008-09. He received his Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Drawing and Painting from Dhaka University in 2009. After spending one year in India, Javed entered Louisiana State University's Master of Fine Arts program in 2011. He intends to graduate in August of 2014.